

Letter from MADE Co-Founder: How to Garner Support for Legislation

Dear MADE State Action Leaders and Members:

In order to get a teen dating violence education law passed in your state you will need support from a variety of sources. In a previous letter, I outlined the three key sources of support: your state Attorney General, your state Department of Education, and your state Department of Health. It is most helpful to gain the support of state legislators and other key persons as well. Below is a list of persons/organizations that can be helpful in the passage of a law.

--**Your State Legislators**: you will want to educate and gain the support of as many state legislators as possible, especially those who will sponsor your bill and those who are on the house or senate education committees and/or justice committees. In order to educate them you should provide them with factual information including the most recent statistics on dating violence, including the stats from the national and state Youth Risk Behavior Surveys (YRBS). Give them information about the warning signs, the cycle of abuse, and the effects on victims. Go to your State House with your legislative sponsors or the legislative lobbyist from your Attorneys General office and meet and educate your legislators in person. An introduction and giving them printed materials to read are sufficient.

--**Teacher Unions**: Contact the head of your state-wide teacher unions (NEA or AFT), tell them about the law you are trying to get passed and ask for their support. Ask for either a letter of support or in-person testimony at committee hearings from their lobbyist. Give them as much information as possible about TDV and the importance of prevention through education. Let them know laws exist in other states.

--**DV Victims Unit Coordinator**: this person might have a different title in various states. Find out who the person is who tracks the DV murders and arrests at the state level (your AG's office would know them), call them, and ask them if they would provide the stats for your state to be used in a committee hearing as testimony or if they could send you the stats for testimony.

--**Expert Witnesses** such as college professors who may be working with your state Departments of Health or the federal Department of Health on the topic of dating/domestic violence, or conducting research in this area. Call colleges & universities to inquire if there are any professors (usually in the sociology or psychology departments) who are involved in this way. They could be asked if they would like to present expert testimony at committee hearings.

--**Families** who have had a daughter murdered by an ex-boyfriend: family members can provide powerful testimony as to the first hand effects of this major health issue and can make this topic "real" for the legislators. They should also include how prevention, education, could have helped them and their daughter if it was offered in a comprehensive manner in the schools.

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--**Professional Statewide Organizations** for health teachers (AAHPERD, American Association of Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance).

--**Non-Profit Domestic Violence Organizations** such as your state's Coalition Against Domestic Violence. You will need to begin by gaining their support first. Reassure them that a law mandating TDV education will open doors for them. You might want to consider having them be designated as expert trainers for health teachers, so that they will provide the training needed for health teachers to teach this topic in our schools and training for all school staff at the secondary level.

--**Teen Victims** and/or teens who believe in the importance of dating violence education can be called upon to testify at committee hearings.

It takes a lot of research and hard work to pull together the support needed to pass a law. Engaging key individuals and organizations will help to build that base of support. And of course, MADE members in your state can help you to accomplish this. Good luck and remember; together we are making a difference.

Sincerely,
Ann Burke
President

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